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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF

JOSEPH M. TONER, M. D.

OF WASHINGTON

BY

THOMAS ANTISELL, M. D.

WASHINGTON, D. C.



REPRINT FROM THE MEMORIAL VOLUME OF THE ROCKY
MOUNTAIN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

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TONER, JOSEPH MEREDITH, M. D., of Washington, D. C., was born in Pittsburgh, Pa., April 30, 1825. He is the elder of two sons, the only surviving children of Meredith and Ann (Layton) Toner. Both his parents were natives of the State of Pennsylvania. His father grew up in Lancaster County, and was raised to agriculture. His mother, Ann, daughter of James Layton, was born in Fayette county, near the present site of Layton Station, on the Connellsville Railroad.

The subject of this sketch received his early education at the common schools of the city of Pittsburgh, and of Westmoreland county, his childhood being passed partly in each of these localities. Subsequently he attended the Western Pennsylvania University for a year, and was then sent to Mount St. Mary's College, where he continued his studies for two years longer, but left without having completed a classical course. After this he engaged in mercantile pursuits for a short time, but as his mind developed he was gradually led to a recognition of a preference for the medical profession.

In the autumn of 1847 he began the study of medicine with Dr. John Lowman, the leading physician of Johnstown, Pa. The office of his preceptor offered exceptionally good opportunities for a certain class of clinical instruction. It was usual in those days for the senior student to compound his preceptor's prescriptions to assist in surgical operations, and occasionally to visit with him the sick-room.

Dr. Toner attended his first course of lectures at the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia in the winter of 1849-50. At the close of this term, he entered (March 1, 1850,) the Vermont Medical College at Woodstock, and received the degree of Doctor of Medicine from this institution in June, 1850. In July of this year he began to practice at Summitville, a village of about three hundred and fifty or four hundred inhabitants, situated at the summit of the Alleghany mountains, on the Portage Railroad, in Cambria county, Pa.

The physician who had practiced in this place for many years (Dr. Christy) had died in the previous month. A circuit of about ten miles was thus left without a medical man, which Dr. Toner was solicited and advised to occupy. The building of the Pennsylvania Central Railroad through the Alleghany mountains began about this time, giving an impetus to business and causing a temporary increase of population of the village and its vicinity. The Doctor soon found his time fully occupied in general practice.

As might be expected on heavy railroad work, such as that on this mountain, many accidents occurred, requiring prompt surgical interference, much of which

fell to his care. This led him for the time to give a preference to surgery, and induced him to spend another winter in Philadelphia, to further perfect himself in that branch. After attending this, a third course of lectures, he received the degree of M. D., from Jefferson Medical College, in the spring of 1853. In the fall of the same year he removed to the city of Pittsburgh, and was in practice there during the cholera epidemic of 1854.

Although his prospect of acquiring a fair practice was encouraging, he determined to go South, and after spending a few months with his mother on the homestead farm in Westmoreland county, at the earnest invitation of a college friend, the Hon. William Walsh, now of Cumberland, Md., he removed in 1855 to Harper's Ferry, Va. At this place in a short time he was busily engaged in practice. While located there during the autumn of this year, the yellow fever prevailed at Norfolk, Va., and Dr. Toner tendered his services to that afflicted city, but sufficient medical aid had previously been secured. But a residence of six months at Harper's Ferry convinced him that the place was too small for any considerable professional advancement. He accordingly took up his present residence in Washington on the 7th of November, 1855.

An earnest student himself, Dr. Toner early became sensible of the embarrassment to the acquisition of knowledge, caused by a want of books. He therefore began the collection of a medical library, which has grown to be one of the largest and most valuable private collections in the country, and certainly south

of Philadelphia. He has succeeded in bringing together much of the literature on cholera, yellow fever, and the other epidemics which have visited our country. The local histories of cities, towns, counties, and of the states, as they contain much medical biography, accounts of local epidemics and topographical information, are for this reason included in his library. His collection of American medical journals is the most complete in the country, if we except that of the library of the Surgeon-General, and that of Dr. Purple, of New York.

He conceived the idea of forming a subject index of the contents of all the American medical journals, and has completed the task up to 1870, covering sixty-five complete files, thus greatly increasing their value for reference. This index includes everything of importance contained in them, whether original or selected matter, and thus differs from a somewhat similar work which is being carried on by Dr. Billings of the Surgeon-General's Office. Dr. Toner's work is an index, properly so-called, which will be of special value to all possessors of files of the leading American medical periodicals, while the work of Dr. Billings is rather a catalogue of all original papers alone in medical journals of all languages.

Dr. Toner has been an active collector of the contributions of American medical authors, particularly those of early date. He has also paid attention to the collection of reports and Transactions of State and local medical societies, the publications of various boards of health, and other matters pertaining in any wise to medical and sanitary science. His library

has always been at the service of the profession of Washington. In 1865, on the appearance of cholera in the United States, the Doctor published a list of the works in his collection treating upon this disease, and tendering their use to the profession. He had numerous applications from a distance; the books were sent by mail or by express as requested. They were all returned without loss or injury. It may be added that the Doctor has shown not only judgment in collecting, but also ability in using his books, as is shown by his several publications.

When engaged on special studies, Dr. Toner may be found at his desk at almost any hour of the day or night, with literally stacks of books around him. He has almost daily applications for information by medical gentlemen residing in different parts of the country, who are engaged in special studies. The very general recognition of his ability and readiness to help others has imposed upon him much labor and a very large correspondence.

The Doctor is fond of statistics, and has skill to analyze what would be to many persons incongruous data, and to classify and bring together related facts and reduce them into comprehensive tables or diagrams. His extensive range of reading and familiarity with medical literature and the wants of the profession are constantly leading him into new lines of inquiry, which he pursues with earnestness and success.

Shortly after coming to Washington, Dr. Toner became connected with the Medical Society, and also with the Medical Association of the District of

Columbia, and has been an active co-laborer in them, and has been honored by them with their highest offices. On retiring from the Presidency of the Medical Society, in 1870, in accordance with the usage of that body, he read an address in which he discussed the vital statistics of the United States from the foundation of the government to 1870. A synopsis of the part of this paper which related to population was published with plates and diagrams by the Bureau of Education, in 1872.

The Medical Society of the District of Columbia was chartered by Congress in 1817, but anterior to 1862 it exhibited but little enterprise, rarely meeting oftener than once or twice a year, to elect officers and and to preserve its chartered existence. About this time a few active spirits, among whom was the subject of this sketch, conceived the idea of arousing it into a recognition of the fact that it was a literary as well as a licensing body. The attempt was successful; the society awoke to active exertions, and has continued to hold weekly meetings, where pathological specimens are exhibited and described, and papers on medical subjects are read and discussed.

Since 1864 the Doctor has been a member of and a constant attendant at the meetings of the American Medical Association. He has served on various important committees, read papers at its meetings, and has interested himself in the current proceedings and deliberations of the body. He was elected President in 1873, and in the following June, at Detroit, he delivered a well-considered and suggestive address, which elicited commendatory notices from the medi-

cal press of the country. Few professional men are more thoroughly familiar with the interests and objects of the association and are more zealous to promote its efficiency for good than Dr. Toner.

Aware of the perishable character of much of our early original medical literature which has been issued only in pamphlets and journals, and feeling the necessity of an extensive and convenient national medical repository which should be under the management of and available to the profession at large, he devised the scheme for a repository of medical works that should be under the control of the profession of the United States, and be located at the national capital. As initiative of the project, he in 1868 prepared a resolution to consider the matter, which was adopted by the Association. A committee was appointed to report at the next meeting "on the practicability of the establishment of a library of American medical works, including books, monographs, periodicals," etc., by the American Medical Association. The Doctor was made chairman of the committee, and in 1869, his report was read at New Orleans, in which he strongly recommended the measure. The report also set forth the means by which such a collection might be formed and augmented. It was accepted by the Association, and the formation of a "national medical library" was commenced. This collection of works is now deposited in a room at the Smithsonian Institution, and has reached the number of about two thousand volumes, including pamphlets. Since that time, the "Library of the Surgeon-General," as it is usually termed, has been created. This collection is properly a branch of

the Library of Congress, though at present under the care of the Surgeon-General of the army. Through the energy and ability of Surgeon J. S. Billings, it has been brought to extraordinary completeness, and being opened to the profession of the country has, to some extent, superseded the necessity of immediate or special exertions in founding the medical repository of the American Medical Association, the one to some degree appearing to duplicate the purposes of the other. But a perusal of the report referred to and the accompanying documents will not fail to impress the idea that the formation of a great American library is here foreshadowed, and that the National Medical Library, under the care of the Surgeon-General, and the pride of the profession of the United States, has resulted from the action of the American Medical Association.

As evidencing the consideration the subject of this sketch has given to the efficient working of the American Medical Association, we will allude to his action in 1865, in proposing an amendment to the plan of organization, which secured an increased annual assessment on each member. This furnishes a fund that enables the society to pay all its current expenses, including rent of a meeting hall and the publication of its Transactions. Harassing appeals for additional contributions and dependence upon eleemosynary aid from members and from the profession at the localities visited, were thus dispensed with, thereby elevating the society at once to the plane of an independent and self-sustaining body, and making it a welcome visitor to every city. His counsel for good in the affairs of the association is not confined to

this measure alone, but may be seen in nearly every volume of the society's Transactions, and his judgment is appreciated by all the leading members and friends of progressive medicine throughout the United States.

Prompted by a desire to encourage students to aspire to a higher and more scientific education in the profession, and being impressed with the idea that much remained to be effected for the encouragement of special and original studies, perhaps through other means than those in vogue, Dr. Toner founded in 1872, by endowment, the "Toner Lectures." "Believing," writes the founder, "that the advancement of science (that is, a knowledge of the laws of nature, in any part of her domain), and specially such discoveries as contribute to the advancement of medicine, tend to ameliorate the condition of mankind," he therefore set aside a fund, the interest of which was mainly to be used in maintaining the "Toner Lectures," to be delivered annually in Washington, to consist of a series of discoveries, memoirs or lectures, which "should contain some new truth or discovery, based on original investigation," which were, if approved, to be published. This fund has been placed under the control of five trustees. Six lectures have already been delivered. They have all been accepted for publication "as additions to knowledge," and printed by the Smithsonian Institution. This is the first attempt to endow a course of lectures based on the conditions of adding new facts for the advancement of medicine, and it is heartily to be desired, that it will continue to occupy the advance ground of medical progress and encourage original research.

With the same philanthropic desire to induce students to work on original lines of investigation and by experiment, and to make discoveries, to promote laudable emulation among them, he has furnished for three years a gold medal which was competed for by the students of Jefferson Medical College. This medal to be awarded for the best thesis embodying the results of original investigation, experiment, or research in some branch of medical science. On the occasion of the presentation of the first one in March, 1875, the Doctor made a few pertinent remarks, very tersely setting forth his views in regard to the value of experiment and research, and their necessity for scientific advancement, and his belief that the most brilliant successes in this direction are to be achieved by the young men of the profession. These remarks are published at length in the *Philadelphia Medical and Surgical Reporter* of that date.

He has also for some years past, placed at the disposal of the Faculty of the University of Georgetown, D. C., a medal, to be awarded at the annual commencement, to the student showing the greatest proficiency in the natural and physical sciences.

When the increasing density of population in our cities began seriously to threaten the stability of the public health and sanitary science and their influence in preventing diseases began to be discussed, Dr. Toner's attention was at once drawn to the study of preventive medicine. He soon gave several essays and monographs to the public, including papers on malarious, endemic, or septicemic poisons. Beginning in 1865 with the consideration of compulsory vaccina-

tion, he followed with papers on cholera, quarantine, yellow fever, and other contagious diseases. Later he published his "Dictionary of Elevations and Climatic Register," a convenient repository of facts of value to writers in studying the geographical distribution of disease, giving the elevation of many thousands of localities and their mean annual temperature, and of rain-fall, so that all observers might see their influence, **if any, on health and mortality.**

The American Public Health Association grew out of the necessity for a union of experienced sanitarians to enforce hygiene in large cities, and to indicate the proper and most effectual mode of bringing sanitary appliances and laws into operation. The election of Dr. Toner, in 1874, as President of that body, was a tribute paid to him as one of the oldest and earliest workers in that field.

His paper, the "Statistics of Boards of Health of the United States," published in 1874, and his address as retiring President of the Association in 1875, upon the "Leading Public Health Questions, etc.," are valuable contributions to the literature of preventive medicine, and show how carefully and extensively he collects his facts, and how widely and aptly he applies the principles of the science of hygiene.

The Doctor has perhaps been the most successful biographer, thus far, of the medical profession of the United States. There is no error in asserting that no physician in the country has made himself equally conversant with the early American medical literature, and the progress of medicine in our country since its first settlement, or has been so assiduous in

the collection and preservation of reminiscences of the lives of our departed and illustrious Nestors. Brochures on medical history and biography have from time to time been published by him, and all have been well received by the profession and the public. Prominent among them are "Necrology of the Physicians of the late War," "Annals of Medical Progress in the United States," "Medical Men of the Revolution," and his "Address on Biography" before the Centennial International Medical Congress in 1876, besides many other necrological monographs, which are but the outcroppings of a more important work in course of preparation, namely, "A Biographical Dictionary of Deceased American Physicians," for which over four thousand sketches are ready for the press.

As an author he has been fortunate in his themes, choosing subjects which will have a lasting interest to the profession. He is noted for his love of definite facts and the extreme care he takes to verify references; and while writing on any subject has piles of books about him far beyond the capacity of his desk and book-racks, often loading the chairs and littering the floor of his office. Dr. Toner has received from his friends the appellation of "the Fact Hunter," which tersely expresses a prominent mental characteristic. His taste for statistics and capacity for originality of method in demonstration are shown in various studies, and particularly in his diagrams to represent the preponderance of sex in the population and the decline of the birth-rate by decades in the United States; in the map showing the localities visited by yellow fever; and in the conception of a plan

for a systematic geographical classification of the States, and the adaptation of a set of symbols to be used after the name of a locality which shall indicate its geographical position. The principle is applicable to a nation, a State, a county, or other political division, thus greatly simplifying the finding of a place on a map by giving a mental indication of a locality by an affix of a symbol to the name. This method has been adopted by the Post Office Department and incorporated in their Directory to designate the localities of the counties in each State in the Union.

He is an authority in nearly all matters relating to the history of medicine, medical biography, and the local history of the District of Columbia.

His address in 1866, before the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, contains a very full and accurate history of medical matters in that locality from the time it was chosen as the seat of the General Government. Some time ago he furnished, from his collection of maps and rare records, data which enabled the compilation of the map which accompanies the work entitled, "Washington in Embryo," which shows the plots and boundary lines of the farms as they existed when the city of Washington was laid out. ✓

The Doctor has always identified himself actively with the public charities of the city. After the burning of the Washington Infirmary in 1861, it was at his instance that the Sisters of Charity founded what is now known as Providence Hospital. The "Nicholson House" was temporarily fitted up by them and opened as a hospital, which he attended for some years. He was also one of the originators of St. Ann's Infant

Asylum, which was first opened in a building on Pennsylvania Avenue, formerly "Maher's Hotel." In 1860 he succeeded Dr. John Dyer as medical attendant to St. Vincent's Female Orphan Asylum, where he served for many years. From the foundation of St. Joseph's Male Orphan Asylum in 1856, he has been and still is the attending physician. He is also physician to other educational and benevolent institutions in Washington. He has on several occasions been solicited to accept professorships in different medical colleges, but has always declined, preferring to enjoy the quiet current of professional life and duty.

Some time ago, the Doctor tendered his valuable library to the profession of Pittsburgh, upon the condition that they provide for it a fire-proof building which should bear his name. Although appreciating the offer, the medical men were unable to raise the means required. But the Western Pennsylvania University, located in Allegheny City, offered to comply with all the conditions. The Doctor, however, prefers the library to be under the sole charge of the medical profession. He next tendered it to the profession of St. Louis, which has also failed to comply with the terms, and it is now under a similar proffer to the city of Chicago.

Dr. Toner has not married, but lives in his own house, in a comfortable, unostentatious manner, surrounded by his books, where he dispenses a quiet hospitality to his friends. The Austrian Universal Exposition, held in Vienna, awarded the Doctor a Medal of Merit with a Diploma, for contributions relating to medical matters in the United States.

He has at different times visited the more noted places in the United States and Canada for pleasure and relaxation, or in the pursuit of a more practical knowledge of the physical geography and climatic peculiarities of North America. In 1871 his trip to the Pacific gave him a coveted opportunity to realize something of the vastness of the continent and to observe the influence of altitude and climate on vegetation and animal life along the line of the great trans-continental highway. After the adjournment of the American Medical Association he made hurried visits to a few of the more celebrated resorts and wonders in California, and stopped one day at Salt Lake City *en route* home.

Dr. Toner is still in the enjoyment of good health, and wields a vigorous pen, and we may confidently hope for new and valuable contributions from him. Sketches of his life have appeared in Allibone's Dictionary of Authors, Johnson's New Encyclopædia, the Northwestern Medical and Surgical Journal, etc.

Dr. Toner is a member of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, of the Medical Association of the District of Columbia, of the American Medical Association, since 1864; of the American Public Health Association; of the Philosophical Society of Washington, and of the Alumni Association of Jefferson Medical College; an honorary member of the California State Medical Society, of the New York State Medical Society, of the Wisconsin Historical Society, and of the Detroit Academy of Medicine; a corresponding member of the Gynecological Society of Boston, of the Virginia Historical Society, of the

Albany Institute, of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Little Rock; a visitor to the Government Hospital for the Insane, and Patron of the Toner Scientific Circle of Georgetown College.

The following is a list of Dr. Toner's chief publications, and which may be found in the Catalogue of the Surgeon-General's Library:

"Abortion in a Medical and Moral Aspect." *Medical and Surgical Reporter*, January, 1861.

"Arrest of Development of the Cranial Bones, followed by Epilepsy." *Medical and Surgical Reporter*, April, 1861.

"Maternal Instinct or Love." 12mo. Baltimore, 1864.

"Propriety and Necessity of Compulsory Vaccination." Transactions of the American Medical Association, and in pamphlet form, 1865.

"History of Inoculation in Pennsylvania." Transactions of the Pennsylvania State Medical Society, and in pamphlet form, 1865.

"Anniversary Oration before Medical Society, District of Columbia," 1866. 8vo. pamphlet in 1869.

"Portability of Cholera and Necessity of Quarantine," 1866. Joint Paper with Chas. A. Lee, M. D. In *New York Medical Record*.

"History of Inoculation in Massachusetts." Transactions Massachusetts Medical Society, 1867.

"Medical Register of the District of Columbia." 12mo. Washington, D. C., 1867.

"Address at the Dedication of Medical Hall, Washington." In the *Baltimore Medical Bulletin*, February 15, 1869.

"Statistics of Representation in the American Medical Association." *Journal of the Gynecological Society of Boston*, November and January numbers, 1870 and 1871.

"Necrology of the Physicians who served in the Late War." *National Medical Journal*, Washington, D. C., 1870.

"Medical Register of the United States, prepared in 1871," which he sold to and was published by S. W. Butler, of Philadelphia, in 1874.

"A Sketch of the Life of Chas. A. Lee, M. D." *New York Medical Journal*, April, 1872.

"Statistics of Boards of Health in the United States." Transactions American Public Health Association, 1873.

"Free Parks and Camping Grounds as Sanitariums for the Sick Children of the Poor of Cities." North Western Medical and Surgical Journal, November, 1872. Rewritten and published in The Sanitarian for May, 1873. Both published in pamphlet form.

"Facts of Vital Statistics in United States, with Diagrams." Circular of the Bureau of Education, March, 1872, and in Pamphle form.

"Statistical Sketch of the Medical Profession in the United States." Indiana Medical Journal, May, 1873.

"Statistics of Medical Associations and Hospitals of the United States." Transactions of the American Medical Association, 1873.

"Address as President before the American Medical Association." Transactions American Medical Association, 1874, and in pamphlet form.

"Dictionary of Elevations and Climatic Register of the United States." Van Nostrand, New York, 1874.

"Annals of Medical Progress and Medical Education in the United States." Circular of Bureau of Education, 1874.

"Contributions to the Study of Yellow Fever, Its Distribution in the United States, with Maps." Transactions of American Public Health Association, and in pamphlet, etc., 1874.

"Annual Oration before the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland." Transactions Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland, 1875, and in pamphlet.

"Address on Public Health Questions," as president of the American Public Health Association. Transactions of American Public Health Association, 1875, and in pamphlet.

"Biographical Sketch of John D. Jackson, M. D." Richmond and Louisville Journal, and in pamphlet, 1876.

"Medical Men of the Revolution." An address before the Alumni Association of Jefferson Medical College. 8vo., Philadelphia, 1876.

"Sketch of the Life of Dr. T. M. Logan." Transactions of California State Medical Society, 1876.

"Biography of Dr. John Morgan, of Philadelphia." 1876.

"Address on Biography" before the Centennial International Medical Congress. Transactions International Medical Congress, and in pamphlet, 1877.

"Water Supply of Cities," before the American Health Association. The Sanitarian for June, 1877.

"Notes on the Burning of Theatres, Public Halls, etc." Pamphlet, pp. 22. 1876.

Address before the Rocky Mountain Medical Association, in pamphlet, 1877. The same, with Memorial Volume of Transactions, containing biographical sketches of all the members, 1878.

Sketch of the life of Prof. Lunsford Pitts Vandell, (Nashville Journal of Medicine and Surgery, Feb., 1878.)

Also numerous short articles in medical journals, and the public papers, etc., such as "Visit to Mammoth Cave," "Blue Grass Regions of Kentucky," "St. Lawrence River," etc. etc. In course of preparation, "Biographical Dictionary of Deceased American Physicians."



